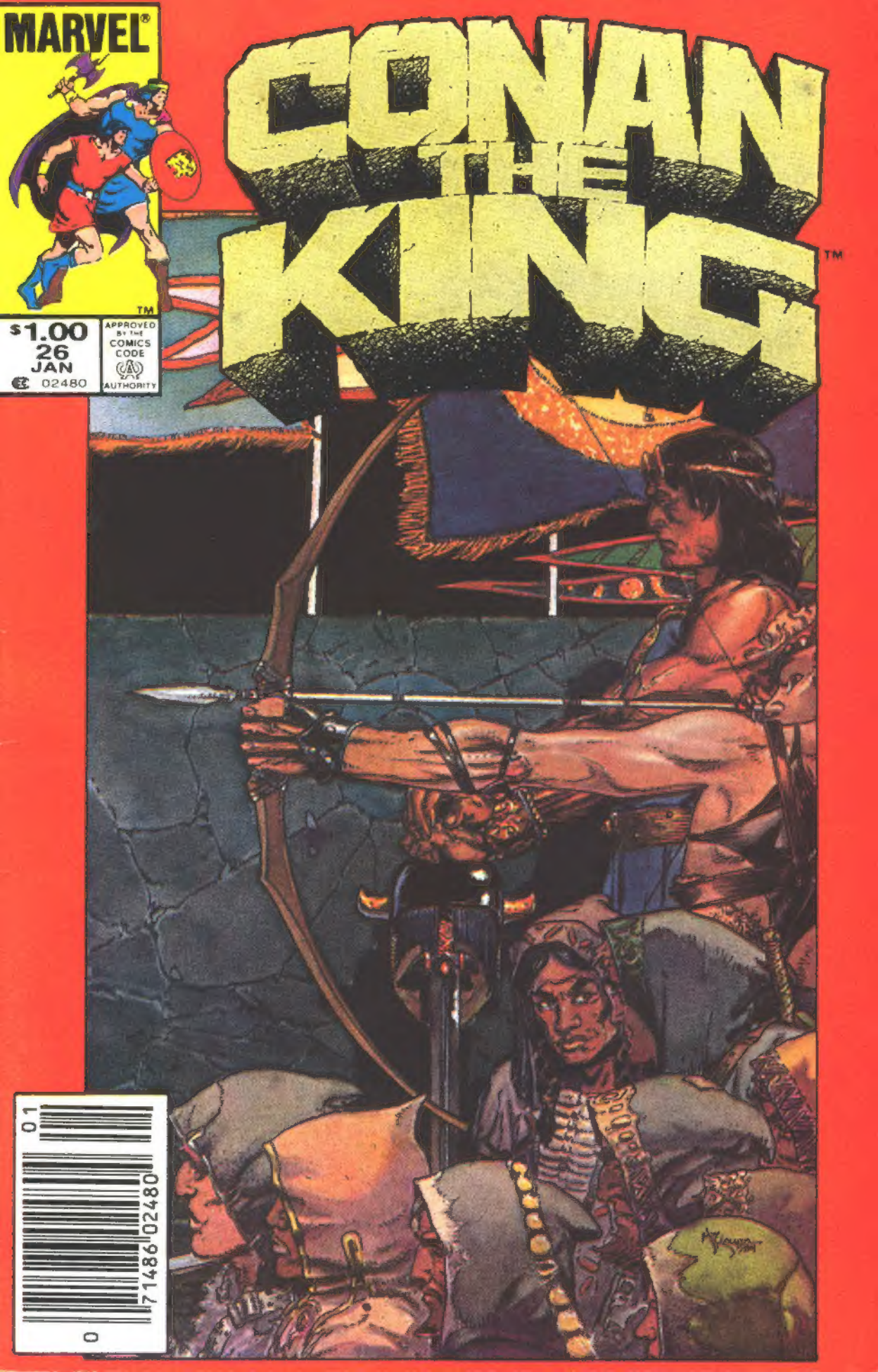
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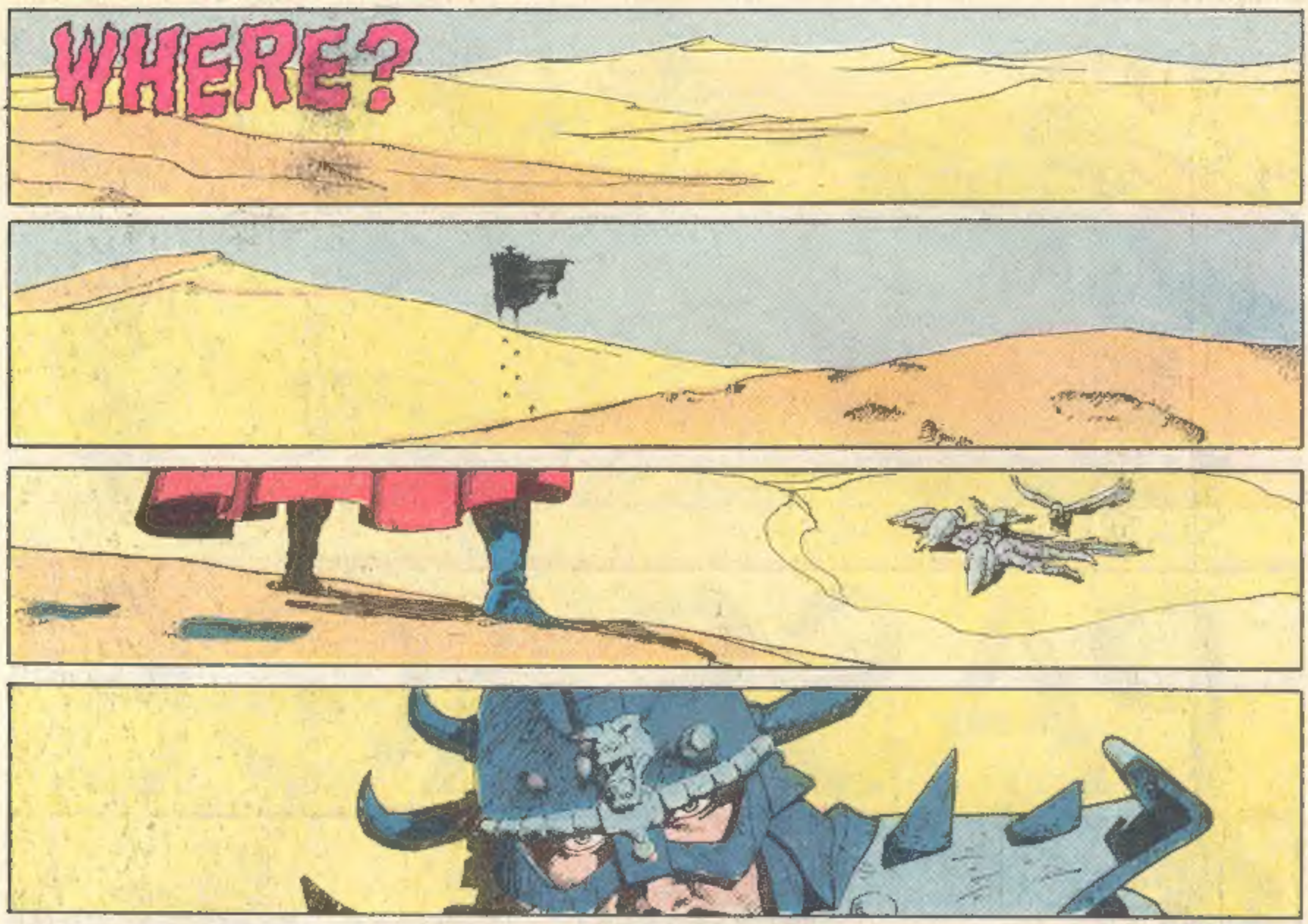

CONAN THE KING™ Vol. 1, No. 26, January, 1985. (U.S.P.S. 589-610) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President, Stan Lee, Publisher, Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing, Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. **SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.** Published bi-monthly. Copyright © 1984 by Conan Properties, Inc. The advertising and editorial material appearing on pages 5, 7, 10, 12, 31, 37, 39, 42, 44, covers 2, 3, and 4 only, copyright © 1984 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price $1.00 per copy in the U.S. and $1.25 in Canada. Subscription rate $12.00 for 12 issues. Canada and Foreign, $14.00. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. **POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO CONAN THE KING, 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, 10TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016.**

STAN LEE PRESENTS:

PASSAGE

NO! NOO

COUNT TROCERO! WAKE UP.

HNH?

MITRA GIVE YE GOOD MORNING AN' GOOD ALE, YR' HONOR.

YE GROANED THE NIGHT AWAY RIGHT LOUD ENOUGH TO FRIGHT THE DEVIL'S AUNT.

DREAMS, *GHORD*. SO MANY DREAMS.

MITRA, I SWEAR I SLEEP FAR TOO MUCH THIS JOURNEY. I USED TO CARRY MY YEARS MORE LIGHTLY THAN THIS.

WELL, TAKE ME ADVICE, YR' HONOR--

--CARRY 'EM BUT ONE DAY MORE AN' WE'LL SUP THIS NIGHT ON COW'S TONGUE AND GARLIC MEAT PIES IN YER OWN PROPER DINING HALL.

SMALL WONDER MEN SAY THERE BE NO KITCHEN IN ALL *POITAIN* LIKE YOURS FOR GENEROSITY, MILORD.

IS THAT WHAT MEN SAY, GHORD? I'VE ALMOST FORGOTTEN.

IT'S YEARS SINCE I'VE BEEN HOME TO KINSMEN AND CASTLE.

MY SERVICE UP NORTH IN *KING CONAN'S* COURT AT *TARANTIA* RAN OVERLONG, WOULD YOU SAY, GOOD SQUIRE?

INDEED OUR PASSAGE THROUGH POITAIN SEEMS AS MUCH A JOURNEY TO THE PAST AS TO THE FUTURE.

DEATH.

WHAT--?

WHERE PAST AND FUTURE KISS, *THERE* BE DEATH. SURE YE KNOW THE PROVERB, YR' HONOR?

OH. YES. YES, I DO. BUT ENOUGH OF PROVERBS AND DREAMS. LET'S BE OFF.

ARRGH, MY ACHING BONES.

I'LL SAY IT AGAIN, GHORD, I NEVER TIRED SO WHEN I WAS YOUNGER...

DAWN BREAKS OVER TARANTIA, AND THE QUEEN IS TROUBLED.

EACH NIGHT THE KING RELENTLESSLY PACES THE CASTLE HALLS. AND, COME MORNING...

...SHE IS ALONE AGAIN.

SHE KNOWS WHAT COMES NEXT.

SHE'S FELT IT COMING FOR MONTHS.

THE KING HAS SPENT TWENTY YEARS IN TARANTIA, TWENTY YEARS OF REPRESSING HIS TRUE NATURE... HIS BARBARIC HERITAGE.

SIXTEEN OF THOSE YEARS WERE SPENT REARING HIS FIRSTBORN SON... HIS PRIDE... HIS LEGACY...

...BUT NOW THE PRINCE IS DEAD,

CUT DOWN BY MYSTERIOUS ASSASSINS IN THE NORTHLANDS. THE KING'S LEGACY... GONE.

AND NOW THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO HOLD HIM HERE.

SO, THOUGH A NEW DAY ARRIVES IN THE CROWN SEAT OF AQUILONIA, QUEEN ZENOBIA IS NOT PLEASED TO GREET IT.

IT'S JUST ANOTHER DAY FEEDING THE GROWING RESTLESSNESSNESS WITHIN THE KING'S BREAST...

... AND A MORNING CLOSER TO THAT INEVITABLE DAY ADVENTURE'S CALL TAKES CONAN THE KING AWAY FROM HER FOREVER.

A SHORT WHILE LATER...

ONE THOUSAND LEGIONNAIRES VIED TO ENTER THE RANKS OF THE *BLACK DRAGONS* THESE PAST FEW DAYS. NOW WE'VE WHITTLED YOUR NUMBER TO UNDER A SCORE.

BY ERLIK, IT'S A MAN OF RARE GRIT I WANT IN *MY* COMPANY.

IF HE HAD ONE FOOT IN PARADISE, AND HIS KING CALLED, A DRAGON WOULD STEP BACK OUT TO HIS LIEGE.

DO YOU *HEAR?*

YES, CAPTAIN!

WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY?

YES, CAPTAIN!

GOOD. THIS FINAL DAY IS FOR KING CONAN'S TESTING, WITH *PROSPERO*, OUR MILITARY REGENT, AS OBSERVER.

CANDIDATES, YOUR *LIEGE* ARRIVES!

YOU MEN MAY BEGIN YOUR PRAYERS *NOW*, IF YOU WISH...

...IF YOU'RE *WISE*.

WELL?!

YOU CALL THESE *WARRIORS*, CAPTAIN?

CROM'S GUTS, MAN! I'VE SEEN MORE MUSCLE ON *BRYTHUNIAN WEASELS.*

YOUR *FIRST* TASK, DOGS, A RACE FROM HERE TO YONDER TREE.

RUN!

HA! IF THIS BE THE KING'S TESTING, I TRUST WE'LL ALL SOON BE--

DRAGON--

UHHHHHHH

UHHHH

UHHHH

SPOTTING!!

SIGH...

LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG DAY!!

HOW NOW, KING CONAN, GLORY OF AQUILONIA!

WHAT IS IT, *BARON MALORIC*? OUT WITH IT.'

THE AUDIT OF THE ROYAL LEDGER IS COMPLETED, MY WORTHY LIEGE--

AND?

AND I THOUGHT YOUR EXCELLENCY SHOULD BE FIRST INFORMED.

LEARN TO TAKE UP SUCH MATTERS WITH THE QUEEN. I'VE MY OWN CONCERNS.

CERTAINLY, MY GOOD LORD, I'LL SPEAK WITH QUEEN ZENOBIA AT ONCE.

EVER YOUR MOST HUMBLE SERVANT, MY KING.

EVER YOUR MOST HUMBLE SERVANT, MY KING.

YOU MAY BEGONE NOW, BARON.

BAH! TO THINK THIS OILY FOP PLAY'S CONAN'S ADVISOR SINCE TROCERO'S LEFT COURT.

WHY, THE NUMB-WIT'S NOT FIT TO SHOVEL DUNGHILLS BEHIND THE STABLES.

THEN I BID YOU A GOOD DAY, YOUR MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY.

HA! YOU'RE A LUCKY MAN, MALORIC --

--IN SO SHORT A SPACE TO HAVE GARNERED THE KING'S CONFIDENCE...

...AND THE SECURITY OF THE COURT--

WHAT--?!

HNH?

UNPH! I CANNOT BREATHE!

MITRA PRESERVE ME!

NOOOOOOOOO

MA-ORIC, YOU ARE A CRUDE AND IGNORANT MEDDLER!

BY THE DARK GODS, WHAT SORT OF DEVIOUSNESS HAVE YOU PRACTICED IN MY ABSENCE?!

THUNK!

DID I NOT WARN YOU TO STAY YOUR HAND FROM INTRIGUES AGAINST THE KING?!

WHEN... WHEN FIRST YOU CAME TO ME FOR GOLD, WIZARD YOU PROMISED CONAN WOULD DIE AND... AND I WOULD WIN A PLACE AT COURT.

BUT YOU DID NOT SAY HOW LONG YOU'D BIDE YOUR TIME BEFORE SLAYING THE KING

WHILE YOU WERE OFF IN STYGIA, I HIRED ASSASSINS TO KILL CONAN THEY FAILED, BUT GOOD FORTUNE SMILED ON ME, NONETHELESS

COUNT TROCERO LEFT THE COURT, AND UNWITTING OF MY SCHEMES THE KING PROFFERED ME IN HIS PLACE NOW THAT I AM AMONG HIS CHIEF COURTIERS I AM CONTENT TO SEE CONAN LIVE...

AND WANT NO FURTHER TRUCK WITH YOUR SORCERY

FOOL! CONAN DIES AND BY MY HAND.

BUT NOT UNTIL HIS MIND FIRST KNOWS EVERY MORTAL ANGUISH, EVERY SHADE OF PAIN AND SORROW THAT MEN ARE HEIR TO

ONLY THEN WILL I BLAST HIM BODY AND SOUL BEYOND OBLIVION.

BAH! I'LL WASTE NO FURTHER TIME ON ONE SO PITIFULLY BENEATH CONTEMPT AS YOU.

BUT KNOW, BARON, WHEN NEXT I RETURN HERE TO TARANTIA, YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF IN THE MAW OF A TRUE DEMON, NOT A CONJURED ILLUSION

FWOOMF

SURE THE HOURGLASS IS TURNED THREE TIMES SINCE WE'VE BEEN A' HORSEBACK, YR' HONOR MIGHTN'T WE HALT?

ME BELLY CRIES LIKE AN ORPHAN FOR SALT BEEF AN' ALE--

LET'S NOT SLACKEN PACE YET, GHORD OUR JOURNEY NEARS ITS END

I'D SOONER LOSE MY RIGHT ARM THAN SEE YOU *LEAVE*, TROCERO.

BUT I HOPE YOU DON'T EXPECT ME TO BEG YOU TO *STAY*.

AS *SUBJECTS* OF *POITAIN*, PROSPERO AND I ARE YOURS TO COMMAND, LORD TROCERO

... BUT DON'T TRY TO DRAG *ME* HOME. LIFE HERE IN THE CAPITOL IS MOST COMFORTING. AND-- PRAISE MITRA ... *INSANITY* ISN'T *CATCHING*.

WHOAAH!

HEY THE DIDDLE, YR' HONOR! SO YER OWN INNARDS GNAW WITH HUNGER AFTER ALL--

THAT PASS

HAIEE! HERE'S TWO WEALTHY PEACOCKS FOR THE PLUCKING!

COME, TROCERO! LET'S SHOW THESE BRIGANDS WHAT STERN METTLE THE COUNTS OF POITAIN ARE MADE OF!

WITH PLEASURE, FATHER!

HA! RUN, DOGS! FOR DARK BEL, THE GOD OF THIEVES HOLDS NO SWAY IN OUR PROVINCE

WHAT IS IT YR' HONOR'S SQUINTIN' AT LIKE AN OLD TAILOR AT A NEEDLE'S EYE?

THERE'S A LAD, TROCERO.

ONE DAY, PLEASE MITRA, YOU'LL BE THE GLORY OF GOLDEN POITAIN AND THE PRIDE OF YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE.

HOLD ONE MOMENT FATHER

WELL WHAT'S IT?

WHY DO YOU SIT THERE STARING AT ME, OLD MAN?

I, I GHORD?

YE HONOR?

TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK WHO'S IT A MAN MUST HONOR THE MORE--HIS FATHER OR HIS KING?

THAT'S NOT FOR ME TO BE ANSWERIN', SEEIN' AS HOW ME PROPER FATHER WAS A MOLDERIN' PIECE O' CLAY A'FORE I HAD TEETH TO CHEW ME FIRST CRUST O' BREAD.

BUT I'LL ROLE YE ONE BACK, MELORD.

SAY WHO'S A MAN TO HONOR MORE--HIS KING OR HIS OWN SELF?

SOON THE ROYAL HOOFS A THUNDER

WHUMP!

THUD!

BACK TO THE LEGION WITH YOU, YOU CLUMSY DOG.

I'LL NOT HAVE A DRAGON WHO CAN'T KEEP A HORSE BETWEEN HIS KNEES.

AS FOR THE REST OF YOU, THE DAY'S ONLY BEGUN, SO PRIDE YOURSELVES LITTLE ON YOUR SUCCESS THUS FAR.

CROM KNOWS I'VE SEEN *STYGIAN MUMMIES* WITH MORE LIFE TO THEM THAN THE WHOLE SORRY LOT OF YOU.

MITRA, THE KING'S SIXTY WINTERS GOING ON *SIXTEEN.*

I GROW PARCHED JUST *WATCHING* HIM DANCE HIS JIG.

LATER, WITHIN THE ROYAL CASTLE.

"MY DEAREST PRINCESS... EACH HOUR'S A DAY, EACH DAY A THOUSAND YEARS WITHOUT YOU

"...STILL, FOR NOW 'TIS BEST THAT I ABSENT MYSELF FROM COURT. WHEN I RETURN I'LL BRING YOU SILKEN SCARVES OF TURQUOISE FROM THE BAZAARS OF *SHEM*. WITH ALL MY LOVE, YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT, LEONIDAS."

MY FATHER LOST A NOBLE SPIRIT WHEN YOU RESIGNED THE POST OF BLACK DRAGON, MY DEAREST LEONIDAS.

BUT I SHALL WAIT FOR YOU FOREVER...

RADEGUND! IT'S YOUR TURN FOR THE TUTOR, SISTER!

SLAM

THAT OLD BAG OF WIND, GUIGEMAR, HAS BORED ME THE MORNING LONG WITH HIS NAMES AND DATES AND DATES AND MORE NAMES.

HISTORY-- AARGH!

I KNOW WHY YOU HATE SCHOOLWORK, *TAURUS*...

..IT'S ALL PART OF BEING A *TROLL*.

THAT, AND NOT *KNOCKING* BEFORE ENTERING A LADY'S BEDCHAMBER

WHO TOLD *YOU* YOU ARE A LADY?

BY THE DARK GODS! RADEGUND AND LEONIDAS...?!

"TSK-TSK! SISTER, AND YOU ENGAGED BY ROYAL LAW TO WED THE BARON'S SON...

"THE SUN SHINES ON ALL ELSE, BUT SMILES ON POITAN." NOW YOU'VE GOT ME SPOUTING PROVERBS, GHORD STILL, IT'S TRUE-- MY PROVINCE IS A PARADISE.

I HAVE [illegible] YOU, PUTAIN

[illegible] BEAT A MULE AT STUBBORNESS--

--ELSE I [illegible] HAVE FOUND REASON TO TAKE MY LEAVE

[illegible] AMANDA [illegible] TO THIS VERY LAKE [illegible] WHEN WE WERE [illegible]?

YOUNG LOVERS EH YA HONOR?

MY [illegible] GUYS NOT [illegible] HEARING EH--? WHAT?

YOUNG LOVERS, YES

PSSST TROCERO

WHO CALLS--?

AMANDA!

CAN YOU CATCH ME, BOLD KNIGHT?

HA' CAN A FOX TAKE A FAWN?

NOW COME MY PIXIE LOVER

--A KISS

FIRST, PLUCK ME AN ORANGE

FEED IT TO ME

THERE'S THE WASTE OF A GOOD ORANGE, MELORD?

I I.. WHAT I MEAN.

IT WAS BITTER, GHORD.

AYE BITTER LIKE A MAN GROWN OLD AND SQUEEZED DRY OF LIFE

TARANTIA

GADUP GADUP GADUP

HAAT!

WHAT? WEARY ALREADY FROM A MERE TEN MILES AT FULL GALLOP?

DISMOUNT, YOU FATHERLESS SLUGGARDS!

AT THE FAR END OF THE WOODS STANDS A *WOODEN TOWER.* ON TOP OF THAT A *VELVET CLOAK* OF YOUR QUEEN ZENOBIA.

FLAME TORCHES HAVE BEEN SET TO THE TOWER'S BASE

BRING ME THE QUEEN'S CLOAK *UNSINGED.*

"HO CONAN, YOU MADE NO MENTION OF THE DRAGON *SYAN-LIN* HIDDEN IN THE WOODS."

"HOW *FORGETFUL,* EH PROSPERO?"

HUNH--?!

I SUPPOSE THIS MEANS I'VE FAILED

I SENSE--

--SOME THING!

IF YOU WANT *ME* YOU'LL HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN *THAT*, DRAGON!

I CAN JUST FEEL IT IN MY BONES!

YOU'LL MAKE IT *THIS* TIME, BORKUS.

YOU'LL BE A DRAGON

--YET?

SPANG

UNFAIR!

UNFAIR!

OH WELL MAYBE NEXT TIME

THE SMOKE RISES QUICKLY THE FLAMES ARE SAVAGE.

NO ONE OF US MAY SUCCEED WITHOUT THE OTHERS.

I'LL DRINK TO THAT.

HAH!

CAREFUL NOW, FELLOW!

YAHEE!

I'LL GRANT YOU CRED T, DOGS! THREE HELPING ONE ANOTHER BEAR THE BURDEN OF SIX

AYE, NO DRAGON PLAYS THE HERO APART FROM HIS FELLOWS

DUSK

TWENTY YEARS OR MORE GHORT

TWENTY YEARS OF A MAN'S LIFE IS A LONG TIME, AND THE BETTER PART OF IT I'VE SPENT AT COURT, A PROP TO THE KING'S GOVERNMENT.

NOW I'LL NOT TAKE SOLE CREDIT BUT MITRA KNOWS I WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO MOLDED CONAN TO SUCCESS TAUGHT HIM HOW TO SIT THE THRONE WITH A CIVILIZED MIEN

AND WHAT'S THE UPSHOT OF IT ALL? THE KING NEAR SCORNS ME.

SOMEHOW I WONDER IF THE NEGLECT MY FAMILY SUFFERED WAS WORTH IT ALL

THERE'S THE REWARD OF HAVIN' NO FAMILY, LIKE MYSELF.

THERE'S BUT ONE HEAD TO WORRY OVER, AN' WHEN THAT'S LOPPED OFF THERE'S NO WORRIES AT ALL.

MILORD, WATCH--!

WHERE'D THAT STAG COME FROM?

WHNNH

NO!

WE ARE YOURS TO COMMAND, LORD TROCERO.

I HOPE YOU DON'T EXPECT ME TO BEG YOU TO STAY

INSANITY ISN'T CATCHING!

INSANITY ISN'T CATCHING! INSANITY ISN'T CATCHING!

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

THUD!

NOOOO!

NOOOO

NOOOOOOOOO!

MITRA PRESERVE MY...

SPLAASH

...SOUL!

GOT A MEAN *LUMP*, YR HONOR, OTHERWISE, YE'LL LIVE.

BAH! I'D NEVER HAVE KNOCKED INTO A BRANCH WHEN I WAS YOUNGER

YOUNG OR OLD -- NEVER YE MIND, EVENING'S FALLEN.

...AND I CAN SMELL THE SQUIRREL STEW IN YER CASTLE BELOW!

TO THE NORTH

CROM! WILL WE NOT FIND *ONE* DRAGON OUT OF A THOUSAND, TARQUIN?

MY STEWARD, TOMAS, STAMPS THE ROYAL SEAL IN WAX ACROSS YOUR SWORD AND SCABBARD

UNSHEATHE YOUR BLADE AND THE SEALS BROKEN.

BRING OUT THE RAVENOUS BEAR FROM THE CAVE WITHOUT DRAWING YOUR STEEL...

GRRRARRR

CRACK!

A MAN S INSTINCTS TO REACH FOR HIS BLADE

BUT, BY YMIR, THOSE WERE NOT YOUR ORDERS

HERE'S TWO FAILED OF THREE, CONAN,

ALL THAT'S LEFT NOW...

S THE PICT''

GRRAR

GRRRRR

SPEAK YOUR NAME, MAN!

HA! HOW D YOU GUESS, LAD!

I D D NOT GUESS I KNOW THE SMELL OF A BEAR AND THE SOUND OF A TRUE PAW.

MY L EGE, 'TIS MY HONOR TO INTRODUCE OUR *NEW* DRAGON

WELL, PROSPERO, WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO APPLAUD...?

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO A BRISK RIDE AND [illegible]E GOOD ALE?

MITRA! WHAT DID THEY FEED YOU GROWING UP IN CIMMERIA? DO YOU NEVER WEARY, CONAN?

ONLY OF THE CROWN MAN

ONLY OF THE CROWN

WELCOME HOME MY LORD

WELCOME HOME.

YOUR FATHER AWAITS YOU, LORD TROCERO

FATHER, I'VE RETURNED.

RETURNED. YES. WHO?

FATHER, IT'S TROCERO.

TROCERO!

AMANDA

TROCERO YES WHO.?

MY BOLD KNIGHT!

I AM TIRED AMANDA, TIRED.. BUT HOME AT LAST

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Six months have passed since Prince Conan II, firstborn of Aquilonia's king, arrived in fabled Khitai and met his half-brother Kang Sho. Now disillusioned with his father, Conn decides to settle in Paikang, content to remain in the far east. And then, rumors of war sweep through the village . . .

By Alan Zelenetz and Marc Silvestri

Stan Lee PRESENTS:

CONAN

SON THE BARBARIAN KIN

NO!

THE JUNGLE DEMON WILL DEVOUR ME ALIVE!

TISSS

GODS OF PAIKANG! SPARE ME!

YOU TRUST YOUR GODS TOO DEEPLY, KANG LOU-DZE

IT'S A MAN'S TASK TO STRIVE AND SLAY

1

LETTERED BY **RICHARD PARKER** COLORED BY **GEORGE ROUSSOS** EDITED BY **JIM OWSLEY**

THIS BAMBOO OUGHT TO STAVE OFF YOUR HUNGER YOU CRAWLER OUT OF HELL!

UNNH!

NOW GIRL--

LET'S LOOSE YOU --

--SO YOU CAN THANK ME

PROPERLY --

KING CONAN! YOU MUST NOT!

BY MITRA'S SACRED VOWS YOU ARE WED TO *QUEEN ZENOBIA* AND *FORBIDDEN*, SIRE, TO ANY WOMAN ELSE.

CROM'S BONES! YOU BALD-PATED MEDDLESOME PRIEST!

I'LL STILL YOUR PRATTLING TONGUE!

STIK

NOW, LASS WHERE WAS I?

FATHER, *DON'T!* NO, FATHER--

CONN, *CONN*, WHY DO YOU CRY OUT?

ARE THERE DEMONS IN YOUR DREAMS AGAIN?

AYE, LI-TAN. DEMONS.

IT IS TIME TO *WAKE*, MY HUSBAND.

DAWN IS RISEN, AND WE MUST READY OUR WAGON

FOR WE ARE FORCED THIS DAY FROM OUR HOME BY THE HORDES OF *GENJIS* WHO SWEEP THIS VERY WAY LIKE BROAD-WINGED BIRDS OF PREY

"HURRY, DEAR CONN-- SOONER BEGUN, THE SOONER DONE

"I HEAR THE RATTLE OF OUR NEIGHBORS' CARTS...

"...AND THE HONKING GEESE DRIVEN FROM THE VILLAGE IN HASTE.

"INDEED, THIS DESPERATE SORROW COMES UPON US UNCALLED FOR."

LET US STOP, MOTHER.

I SHALL TRY TO PERSUADE HIM ONE LAST TIME.

CONN! YOUR BROTHER CALLS.

KANG SHO

KANG LOU-DZE

WELL, BROTHER?

I AM OFF FOR *AQUILONIA'S COURT* AT TARANTIA, THERE TO MEET THE *FATHER* I HAVE *NEVER KNOWN*, CONAN THE KING.

WILL *YOU* RETURN WITH ME?

I TH NK *NOT*

I HAVE KNOWN YOU BUT SEVERAL MOONS, YET BY THE BLOOD WE SHARE I FEEL WE HAVE SHARED A LIFETIME

KANG SHO?

YES?

SWEAR BY OUR BLOOD KINSHIP THEN YOU'LL BREATHE *NO WORD* OF ME SHOULD THE GODS GRANT YOU SAFE PASSAGE TO OUR FATHER'S COURT.

BY OUR BLOOD, HERE'S MY WORD ON IT

I . I MUST GATHER THE TOOLS NOW FROM THE GARDEN .. AND LOAD THE OX-CART.

I PASS THE NIGHT AT YANTS.N VILLAGE WHERE *MY* MOTHER WILL ABIDE WITH KINSMEN.

IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, YOU CAN STILL--

FAREWELL BROTHER

PEACE OF SPIRIT TO YOU, CONN.

GOODBYE KANG LOU-OZE

THE PRINCE CANNOT FORGIVE ME FOR THE LOVE I ONCE GAVE HIS FATHER -- YOUR FATHER -- SO MANY SUMMERS GONE...*

... WHEN CONAN PASSED THROUGH KHITAI SEEKING HIS ABDUCTED WIFE AND QUEEN.*

NOR CAN HE FORGIVE CONAN, IT SEEMS.

* KING CONAN #8 -- OWL

"... FOR CONN JUDGES HIM *UNFAITHFUL* TO HIS *MOTHER*, ZENOBIA."

I SEE THAT YOU HAVE *MARRIED*, MY FIRST-BORN SON AND PRIDE.

MOTHER?! HOW--?

AND YOU HAVE CHOSEN A *VIRTUOUS* WIFE

YES. HER... NAME IS LI-TAN.

TRUE LOVE CAN LAST FOREVER, CONN. YOU MUST BE A *FAITHFUL* HUSBAND AS YOUR FATHER HAS BEEN TO ME.

BUT TELL ME, WHY DO YOU NOT COME *HOME* NOW?

BRING LI-TAN AND LIVE WITH *US* IN *ACQUILONIA*--

FATHER. KANG LOU-DZE

WHAT IS IT, CONN? WHAT ARE YOU STARING--

DON'T TURN AROUND!

--STARING AT?

L-TAN! NOTHING.

COME, WE WE MUST SEE TO THE WAGON

IF IT BE YOUR HEART'S DESIRE TRAVEL TO AQUILONIA WITH YOUR BROTHER, HUSBAND.

I WILL STAY AMONG FRIENDS F YOU FEAR I WOULD BURDEN YOU ON SO LONG A JOURNEY

NO L-TAN. THAT IS NOT IT AT ALL

AND SOON

THERE SHOULD BE THE LAST OF IT.

HEAR US, MEN OF KUNMING!

DON'T FORGET TO SET TORCH TO HUT AND FIELD!

LEAVE NOTHING BEHIND BUT SCORCHED EARTH FOR THE DOGS OF *GENJIS*.

NOW CAPTAIN LAOTUNG IS IN NEED OF MORE SKILLED WARRIORS TO FACE THE COMING *HORDES*.

MEN OF METTLE ENOUGH TO SPIT IN DEATH'S TEETH, MEET US AT THE RIVER BEFORE DUSK

YOU ARE *TROUBLED* CONN.

WOULD YOU *JOIN* LAOTUNG'S SOLDIERS? WOULD YOU *RETURN* TO AQUILONIA? OR WILL YOU *STAY* WITH *ME* AND MOVE ON?

YOURS *ALONE* IS THE DECISION, MY HONORED HUSBAND.

THERE'S NO *DECISION* TO MAKE, LI-TAN

ONCE I FETCH MY *BOOTS*, WE MOVE ON WITH THE *OTHERS*.

THE ONLY PLACE YOU'LL BE *MOVING ON* TO IS *HOME*.

PUT THESE ON AND GET YOUR HIDE *BACK* TO *TARANTIA* BOY, BEFORE I *KICK* IT BACK

NAY FATHER, I'M NO BOY.

SINCE I WAS LEFT FOR DEAD IN GUNDERLAND I HAVE KNOWN SLAVERY AND THIEVERY, HAVE PROWLED WOODS LIKE THE WOLVES AND MADE HARD STONES MY PILLOW

I HAVE SEEN THE BEST AND WORST OF MANKIND--

*/ISSUE #20 -- OWS

-- AND GROWN BEYOND TAKING ORDERS FROM A LECHEROUS OLD GOAT WHO BROKE HIS SACRED VOWS TO MITRA AND BETRAYED MY MOTHER'S HONOR!

CROM'S GUT!/

NO WHELP OF MINE PREACHES TO ME!

KRAK!

MY MOTHER IS NO COMMON WENCH, SIRE, AND YOU HAVE SHAMED HER.

AYE, YOUR WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN ONE LONG SHAMEFUL WANDERING, SOWING SINS BEHIND YOU, HAS IT NOT?

NO MORE, FATHER.

YOUR SINS BEGIN TO RETURN UPON YOUR HEAD.

THUD

DON'T LECTURE ME, BOY...

YOU AREN'T HALF THE MAN I AM...

KWOK

...AND YOU NEVER WILL BE!

KLOP

YOU'RE COMING BACK.

YOU'RE COMING HOME...

...IF I HAVE TO DRAG YOU THE LENGTH OF KHITAI BY YOUR SCALP!

STOP LYING TO YOURSELF, BOY.

YOU'LL COME HOME.

YOU HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

DUSK...

YOUR SWORDS AND YOUR SOULS MUST FORGE AS *ONE*...

... AND NONE MUST HOLD HIS OWN LIFE DEARER THAN THE *LIBERTY* OF OUR *LAND* AND THE *SAFETY* OF OUR *FAMILIES*.

THOSE OF YOU WHO'VE CHOSEN TO JOIN US HAVE *FORSAKEN* THE *PAST*...

AND HOLD FAST TO THE *FUTURE'S* PROMISE--

DEATH TO GENJIS AND HIS CURSED MONGREL HORDES!

MAY WAR *NOT* MAKE A *WIDOW* OF YOUR *BRIDE* OF SEVERAL MOONS.

COME HOME *SAFELY* AND SOON, MY PROUD HUSBAND.

I HAVE LEARNED THAT A MAN'S DESTINY IS *ALWAYS* DARK.

STILL, I, TOO, PRAY MITRA GRANT US TO *RENEW* OUR LOVE ONCE BATTLE'S DONE.

FAREWELL, LI-TAN.

I GO TO EMBRACE MY OWN DARK DESTINY.

THE END

KING CONAN

℅ MARVEL COMICS GROUP
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New York, New York 10016

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ASSISTANT EDITOR

We like to get your letters. But if you don't want your full address published, please tell us.

Dear Marvel,

FANTASTIC! CONAN THE KING #24! Y'know, I think I'm hooked!

M.T. Lunsford
82C Jonesboro Road
McDonough, GA 30253

Dear Marvel,

I just got issue #24 of CONAN THE KING. I really enjoyed it as much as issue #23. You had me going in the second feature, CONAN SON OF THE BARBARIAN KING, when Zandra zapped Conn back to the woods in Aquilonia. That's probably as close to home as he can get. I guess you're going to let Conn stay away from his father a long time.

Edward Busey
Murfreesboro, TN

Dear Jim and Crew,

In CONAN THE KING #24 you said you had a lot of readers in Canada. Well, let it be known that there is at least one very loyal CONAN THE KING fan in Cleveland.

Now down to the nitty-gritty. Conn is in Khitai, right? When and if Conn gets back to Aquilonia, it would be nice to see him spending some time in the Black Dragons. Speaking of the Black Dragons, will Radegund and Leonidas be united?

As always the art was superb. Dave Simons is great. The plot was great. I sincerely wish CONAN THE KING were monthly.

Bernard Peters
Cleveland, OH

Dear Jim, Alan, Dave, Geof, Marc, and Crew,

CONAN THE KING is the greatest and issue #24 was the greatest of all.

The cover was terrific.

The script was marvelous.

The artwork was dazzling.

The Conn back-up was definitely great (and the crossover with the main story . . . WOW!).

Now CONAN THE KING is one of your best mags, and boys, its glory overtakes such winners as X-MEN, MICRONAUTS, DR. STRANGE, FANTASTIC FOUR and ALPHA FLIGHT.

Mr. Zelenetz, you have made this mag very different from CONAN THE BARBARIAN or SAVAGE SWORD and, in some ways, superior. The art team is one of the most exciting in Marveldom. Mad Zandra is your best new character (Dexitheus is not bad either). Please don't kill her, she is worthy of being in your supporting cast for a long pack of issues. The back-up is also part of the greatness. Don't remove it, it would be very bad.

Keep up the good work and you'll get more and more fans in America and all around the world.

Fransois Montauban
16 Rue del Wallons
75013 Paris France

Dear Staff of Conan The King:

I have been a fan of all the Conan magazines for a long time, and I have read all of the original novels. I just wanted to point out one major flaw you have made in the Conan continuity. In CONAN THE KING, Conan's daughter Radegund looks to be in her mid to late teens, when, according to the original novels, she should only be about six years old.

Steven Wieting
47 Winthrop Drive
Peekskill, N.Y. 10566

We're glad you brought that up, Steven, and you're right. The point is, CONAN THE KING, like CONAN THE BARBARIAN, THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, and the Conan movies, are all adaptations of the original works. We've kept fairly close to Howard's original continuity, but in certain areas (notably the age difference of Conan's children) we've taken certain liberties for the sake of drama.

Dear Alan,

CONAN THE KING is really taking off. With issue #24 you have become the best written comic at Marvel. Simonson, watch out! The way you saved the splash page 'till the end was a real surprise. The two stories flowed together perfectly! I'm sticking with you!

The art is exceptional too. What a cover! Do you think you could get Mr. Kaluta to do the inside pages, just once?

Mark Zak
98 Gay Drive
West Seneca, NY 14224

Well, Michael has never run a printing press before, Mark, but he's willing to give it a try . . .

Dear Jim, Alan, et. al.,

I have just finished reading CONAN THE KING #24. Not a bad issue, but where was Conan? Oh, wait, you don't really mean to make me believe that that short-haired, pug-nosed little jerk wearing the earrings was Conan??!! Come off it! If one thing I've come to like about Conan is this solemn, simple-eyed look he HAD! You know, "black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword-in-hand . . . with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth." What's made him change so? Fashion? Since when does Conan follow fashion? And it can't be for decoration. He usually adorns himself with a sword and battle axe along his belt! Give him back his long hair and long, hard nose. And don't forget that stern look of his and his bulging muscles. If anything, though, at least ditch the earrings (yechhh!).

Ken Dunckley
795 Grand Blvd.
Westbury, N.Y. 11590

Uh . . . okay.

Dear Marvel,

In issue #24's letter column, Dave Simons states that Dexitheus was never in any other Conan comic book. As far as I can tell he first appeared in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #49. Perhaps this was a different Dexitheus, or maybe he just changed his appearance as Mad Zandra did in this issue.

Bill Carr
6704 Long Avenue
Sylvania, OH 43560

We stand (or sit) corrected, Bill. Thank you for your letter.

Dear Folks,

Conn is an excellent character. The grim despair of being so close, yet ever so far from his father, looks to haunt him (and us) for many issues to come and boy is it frustrating having to wait two months between issues (hint, hint). Conan's daughter Radegund has a fire in her eye that'd do Red Sonja proud. I'm eagerly waiting for more of her probably rebellious exploits.

I realize this is not as deep and insightful as intended, but what the heck. For twelve years I've been reading the stories you bullpenners spin and I've finally taken action and written. Love and peace.

Andy Heidt
459 Jean Street
Madison, WI 33703

Dear Jim,

CONAN THE KING #24 was an entertaining book. After all isn't that really the name of the game. A few interesting points to be commended on: young Zandra, Taurus's goat foot, T.M. Maple's letter, Dave Simons' earring, the art, the script, and the mood of the book. From the letters page it seems that Michael Kaluta talks to himself a great deal.

My predictions for the future. Taurus slips off with Zandra to go slam dancing at a Heavy Metal Shop down the road. Conan turns in his smelly horse for 80 cubic inches of Harley-Davidson; one of those dual belt jobs. Also a surprise visit by Albert Einstein. He built a time-displacement vehicle, ya know, but told no one.

Jim Chapman
Ville Platte, LA

Hey Larry! LARRY! You been givin' away our plot secrets again?!

Dear Marvel,

Conan, like any father, measures his children according to his own standards — namely how he would act in such a situation — and this fatherly characteristic is providing some very interesting storylines. He obviously identifies very much with his eldest son, Conn, and because of this was so distraught over his apparent death, revealing to us a side of Conan very rarely seen. Conn, in turn, lives up to his father's image in his own backup series (a series which I hope will develop into his own mag, perhaps even replacing his father in CONAN THE BARBARIAN). I don't think Conan knows how to behave towards his daughter. If he knew she was interested in a Black Dragon I think he would be more than a little worried. Having been a virile and extremely active youth himself, he very well knows what a Black Dragon would probably see in his young daughter. Then there's Taurus, who is probably the most ironic thing that has ever happened to Conan. After years of fighting sorcerous spawned monsters and killing somewhere in the neighborhood of several hundred wizards, witches and sorcerers of various caliber, it just happens that his son is becoming one of these hated people. It is a rather funny situation, though not for Conan, who relies on physical strength to get everything done. The only thing he can do, short of strangling the brat to death, is to prevent him from meddling in magic. I don't think he will be too successful, especially with mad Zandra around. Taurus himself is not helping the situation by hating both his father and Conn, so what happens to him in upcoming issues will probably be well deserved, like that goat leg. Which brings me to the point of this letter, namely that by looking at his children and evaluating them against his fixed set of standards, Conan is finally coming face to face with who he really is. In a more sedentary life than his youth, Conan has time to reflect how he feels, what he thinks of himself and those around him. And I don't think he likes this one bit and it is probably what prompts him to go on expeditions where he does not have time to philosophize about life, just simply live it like he always had. I look forward to further issues on how he deals with these problems — it will be interesting to say the least. Won't it?

K.J. Lindemuth
Farmington Hills, MI 48018

Dear Conan,

I wish you would believe that your son is, indeed, alive. What you saw was not just an illusion of your favored son. I too saw the lad with my very eyes. The disappearance of your son before your eyes was the work of the she witch Zandra. She and your son Taurus banished Conn far away, I know not where. The reason your son Taurus helped her was because of his own greed for the throne. I read of all this and more in CONAN THE KING #24. May I suggest that you pick up a copy and find out more for yourself!

John Giordano
30 Sunset Way
Pembroke, MA 02359